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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISTANBUL 000348

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/13/2013

TAGS: [PREL](#) [AM](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKISH-ARMENIAN RECONCILIATION COMMISSION MEETS,
CONSIDERS CHANGES

Classified By: Consul General David Arnett for Reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary: Following a March 10 meeting to review and discuss a report it had commissioned from the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), members of the Turkish Armenian Reconciliation Commission (TARC) have been unable to reach agreement on how to deal with the contentious "genocide" issue. Moving forward, TARC may make some changes in its composition and focus in order to overcome fundamental differences that have hindered progress in its work to date. End Summary.

2. (SBU) The Turkish Armenian Reconciliation Commission (TARC) met in London on March 10 to review and discuss the report it had commissioned in July 2002 from the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ). The ICTJ report, entitled "The Applicability of the U.N. Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide to Events Which Occurred During the Early Twentieth Century," was sent to TARC members last month and has subsequently been reprinted in the Turkish and Armenian press. Although the ICTJ report's explicitly legal nature and narrow focus dramatically limit its implications, the simple fact that both the Armenian and Turkish members of TARC agreed to commission the ICTJ report is a positive development. The first half of the report indicates that "no legal, financial, or territorial claim arising out of the Events could successfully be made against any individual or state under the Convention." But the report continues in the second half to note that the Events themselves could be said "to include all of the elements of the crime of genocide as defined in the Convention" (in other words, that the term "genocide" can be applied to tragedy that befell the Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire).

3. (U) The report has not received significant attention in the Turkish press. Former Ambassador and TARC member Gunduz Aktan has publicly expressed his concern that the ICTJ's conclusions might be taken out of context and interpreted as a judgment on the Events themselves rather than a legal opinion on the applicability of a legal definition. He and others have commented that because the term "genocide," as legally defined by the Convention, can be applied to any number of ethnic clashes, it has lost all practical meaning.

4. (C) On March 12, former Turkish Ambassador (also President of the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation) Ozdem Sanberk and Sabanci University Professor and former Bosphorous University Rector Ustun Erguder (both TARC members) told poloff separately that the March 10 meeting had gone reasonably well. Over the course of past meetings, Sanberk and Erguder said that interpersonal dynamics between the Turkish and Armenian participants have been good, although they continue to have fundamental differences on the key issue of "genocide." (Note and Comment: Erguder had earlier remarked to poloff that "one particular Turkish member" had been offended and upset by the exchanges during one of the sessions and that this had led to a long pause in the TARC's activities. Based on Erguder's comments, poloff believes that he may have been referring to Gunduz Aktan. End Note and Comment.) Sanberk reported that there had been "total disagreement," for example, on the ICTJ report, particularly its second half. Erguder told poloff that he personally had found the ICTJ report to be fair and balanced, but confirmed, however, that the only aspect the Commission could agree on was to put the report behind them. Looking forward, Sanberk and Erguder said that the TARC will continue its work, but that there was a possibility that there might be partial, or even total, changes in both the Armenian and Turkish sides of the Commission. Erguder added that he had suggested that TARC abandon the "genocide" issue for now and focus instead on promoting other people-to-people and civil society activities. He claimed that Armenian Assembly of America Chairman Van Krikorian reacted favorably to this proposal.

5. (C) Comment: The TARC has had a rocky and difficult road, particularly in weathering criticism from the Armenian

diaspora. Sanberk and Erguder claim from their personal experience that Turks have been far less critical than Armenians of the TARC. However, TARC's work is not widely followed in Turkey. At the same time, we are beginning to hear such criticism in Istanbul as well. Most recently, for example, Kaan Soyak (please protect), the President of the Turkish-Armenian Business Development Council (a commercial group that also promotes people-to-people and commercial activities), told poloff on March 8 that his contacts in both the Armenian and Turkish communities are fed up with TARC and are eager for "a new approach."

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